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FRANK T. SCAVO
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International Secretary-Treasurer

August 26, 1977

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ACTION
is assigned to
D/HA

Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
The Department of State
2201 C Street
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

A most distressing report appeared in yesterday's New York Times (a facsimile of which is attached) purporting that increasing numbers of shipmasters of all flags are ignoring groups of Vietnamese refugees adrift on the China Sea and awaiting rescue.

The report flatly asserts:

"In shipping circles here and in Southeast Asia, it is recognized that the violations have become everyday occurrences and suspicions are voiced that some companies may have ordered their captains not to pick up "boat people."

"The reason is that almost all Asian countries are reluctant to grant refugees even temporary shelter and have made serious difficulties for captains wishing to let these passengers off at their next port of call.

"Great losses of time, danger to cargoes and governmental bureaucratic complications have ensued for shipping lines. How many lives have been lost because of the reluctance of ports and ships to rescue these refugees will never be known."

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT ANALYSIS

Honorable Cyrus R. Vance August 26, 1977

I am not in a position to know if this report is exaggerated, for the information that I receive would appear to indicate that Masters of American flag vessels are actively participating in rescue missions wherever and whenever called upon.

It is a fact, however, that our Masters are placed under great stress in such episodes because of the complications that they must face in ultimately landing survivors in some foreign ports of call. In such ports, as you know, the survivors along with the ship's crew are restricted to the vessel when it arrives pending disposition of the rescued. This works a needless hardship on the Officers and crew, and further aggravates the stress upon the Master.

These "complications" -- and any others that inhibit the swift removal of survivors at sea -- should be positively corrected at once, and the Department of State should make its position known to foreign governments who restrict the movement of American Officers and crews when their ships go to the aid of people in distress at sea.

Respectfully,

Frank T. Scavo
International President

FTS:tmd
Enc.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 1977

MORE SHIPS IGNORING VIETNAM'S REFUGEES

Captains Said to Spurn Appeals for Fear of Red Tape and Losses

By HENRY KAMM
Special to The New York Times

KOBE, Japan, Aug. 21—The three groups of Vietnamese refugees sheltered in a Roman Catholic home in this port city have been recovering from their arduous escapes by small boat since May.

The 104 persons—about one-third of them children—spend their time learning English from a priest, watching television in a language they don't understand, reliving awful memories and waiting for an embassy to give them a visa to a place of permanent refuge.

Since Japan refuses to consider asylum for anyone, their hopes center on the United States, France and Australia. They have vaguely heard of the American decision last month to admit 7,000 "boat people," but no official has talked to them about it, and they can only hope.

Their memories are of fears of being caught, of drownings, of death of hunger, thirst or exposure and of constantly bailing out their rickety craft while retching with seasickness.

Those were the dangers they expected when they set out. And they can speak of them matter-of-factly. But they cover with smiles and little laughs their embarrassment over the anger they feel about the many ships that passed them by while they were adrift at sea.

Asian Countries Reluctant

Before they were rescued—each group by a Japanese merchant vessel—they had all tasted the bitterness of having ship after ship ignore their pleas and SOS signals and abandon them to the sea, with food, water and fuel running low, passengers ill and the coast far off.

Since the heavy refugee flow from Vietnam began last year, there have been increasingly frequent reports of violations of the traditional requirement that all ships encountering others in distress come to their rescue.

In shipping circles here and in Southeast Asia, it is recognized that the violations have become everyday occurrences and suspicions are voiced that some companies may have ordered their captains not to pick up "boat people."

The reason is that almost all Asian countries are reluctant to grant refugees even temporary shelter and have made serious difficulties for captains wishing to let these passengers off at their next port of call.

Great losses of time, danger to cargoes and governmental burcaucratic complications have ensued for shipping lines. How many lives have been lost because of the reluctance of ports and ships to rescue these refugees will never be known.

Merchant vessels are not the only suspected offenders. The leader of a group of 28 refugees that set out from Saigon May 8 said that on May 10 their boat flashed an SOS to the Australian naval vessel Vendetta. The vessel pulled up by the fishing boat. The Viethamese group leader—he did not want his name printed for fear of reprisals against his relatives in Vietnam—asked for help and said that some people aboard were ill.

Passed by 21 Ships

While Australian sailors leaned over the rail to photograph the scene, the captain replied that he regretted he could not take the refugees aboard because his ship was on patrol. The refugee leader said the Australians then lowered medicines, water and fruit juice to them and a map indicating that Malaysia was 20 hours away. The Vendetta, a large destroyer that is listed as carrying a crew of 320, returned to its patrol.

"We had hoped to be invited aboard," the refugee leader said.

The next day, said the leader, a former Education Ministry specialist, 21 ships passed within their sight in 12 hours. The Vietnamese signaled with flares and homemade flags, but no ship acknowledged the signals.

"I thought that they were busy, or because they had to feed us, or because they had difficulties with governments for political reasons," the refugee leader said in apology for those who failed to try to save the lives of his group, which included three young children and a pregnant woman.

Members of one group that left Vietnam from Cam Ranh on July 12 reported having passed within 50 yards of a ship bearing an Esso band around its smokestack on July 14 and being ignored by its crew. The 56 refugees on the boat later narrowly escaped capture by Chinese in the Paracel Islands, where they stopped to ask for drinking water before being rescued by a Japanese freighter.